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SUBJECT: ARGENTINE PROSECUTORS SEEK TO TRAVEL TO THE U.S.  
IN SEARCH OF VALIJAGATE EVIDENCE

REF: BUENOS AIRES 462 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Argentine press indicates local prosecutors are looking to travel to the U.S. to gather evidence for their investigation into the infamous Venezuelan suitcase with US\$800,000 seized by GOA officials in August ¶2007. Articles published in La Nacion on May 11 and 12 provide new information on connections among the passengers on the private plane which carried the suitcase and its protagonists, but did not elicit much reaction. End summary.

¶2. (U) According to press reports, Attorney General Esteban Righi is considering a request by the two Argentine prosecutors in the case against two Venezuelans connected to the suitcase investigation, the father and son Uzcategui (reftels), to send their staff to Venezuela and the United States to collect information about the case. Uzcategui senior was PDVSA's senior representative in Argentina and his son was a passenger on the plane along with Antonini-Wilson which brought the suitcase to Buenos Aires. The prosecutors' stated objective is to obtain copies of the evidence collected in Miami and Caracas. The Uzcateguis are scheduled to testify on May 28th in Argentina; they have postponed their trial date multiple times.

¶3. (SBU) The Embassy notes that Argentine Public Ministry has not reached out to Legatt to coordinate the visit reportedly requested by their prosecutors. Such a visit would normally be coordinated by the Argentine Embassy in Washington with DOJ and/or the FBI, but post is not aware of any contact. The GOA separately transmitted requests for Antoni-Wilson's extradition and for evidence pursuant to the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT). To the best of post's knowledge, both requests have gone unanswered because of pending prosecutions in Miami.

¶4. (U) Newspaper of record "La Nacion" published a two-part series May 11-12 revealing that the infamous suitcase was brought to the Caracas airport on August 3, 2007, by the President of PDVSA's bodyguard Reiter Ramirez. Ramirez reportedly works for PDVSA's Loss Control and Prevention (PCP) department, the security branch that allegedly conducts internal espionage, protects physical infrastructure, and diverts funds. Wilmer Barrientos was reportedly head of PCP from 2003 until October 2007. In this position, Barrientos had been the BRV's head of security for the South American Energy Summit held in Venezuela's in April 2007. The articles also report on several social gatherings among several of the plane's passengers in Caracas.

Comment  
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15. (SBU) Although the valijagate "expose" made the front page of La Nacion's Sunday (May 11) edition, it did not elicit much comment or reaction. Likewise, the prosecutors' proposed trip to the United States is at once an acknowledgement that they are not seriously pursuing potentially more productive lines of inquiry domestically (some of the passengers on the plane that brought Antonini Wilson to Argentina remain here in Buenos Aires) and that the Argentine judicial "investigation" is settling into the routine of procedural dodges and dilatory maneuvers.

WAYNE